

## Message Text

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ACTION EA-09

INFO OCT-01 EUR-12 ISO-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-04 H-01

INR-07 L-03 NSAE-00 NSC-05 PA-01 PRS-01 SP-02 SS-15

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P R 150940Z MAR 77

FM AMEMBASSY SINGAPORE

TO SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 7319

INFO AMEMBASSY BANGKOK

AMCONSUL HONG KONG

AMEMBASSY JAKARTA

AMEMBASSY KUALA LUMPUR

AMEMBASSY LONDON

AMEMBASSY MANILA

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 1 OF 2 SINGAPORE 1078

NOFORN

E.O. 11652: XGDS-1

TAGS:PINT, PINS, PFOR, SHUM, SN

SUBJECT: OVERVIEW OF CONTINUED GOS CAMPAIGN AGAINST DISSIDENCE

REF: (A) SINGAPORE 1007, (B) SINGAPORE 874

1. SUMMARY. GOS ADVANCED ITS CURRENT ANTI-SUBVERSION CAMPAIGN MARCH 11-12 BY RELEASING STATEMENTS OF DETAINED CORRESPONDENT ARUN SENKUTTUVAN, HOLDING AN ARUN-RAMAN TELEVISED PRESS CONFERENCE, AND RE-ARRESTING FORMER FEER CORRESPONDENT HO KWON PING. IN ADDITION, FOREIGN MINISTER RAJARATNAM EMPLOYED A PARLIAMENTARY APPEARANCE TO UNDERLINE THE EDUCATIONAL VALUE OF RECENT ARRESTS AND DISCLOSURES. WHILE GOS PUBLICIZES KEY ISSUE AS BEING THE MANIPULATION AND EXPLOITATION BY COMMUNISTS OF DISSIDENTS, NET IMPACT OF CAMPAIGN HAS BEEN TO CHILL POLITICAL ATMOSPHERE, SINCE IT EFFECTIVELY NARROWS SCOPE FOR ACTIVITIES OF LEGAL OPPOSITION. GOS SPONSORED

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CONDEMNATION OF FAR EASTERN ECONOMIC REVIEW AND ITS EDITOR, AND PRESS TREATMENT ACCORDED WESTERN JOURNALISM IN GENERAL, RAISE POSSIBILITY OF FURTHER ACTION AGAINST FOREIGN MEDIA AND MEDIA REPRESENTATIVES. GOS UTILIZATION OF INTERNAL SECURITY ACT AGAINST NON-COMMUNIST CRITICS, COUPLED WITH SHORT LEASH RESTRICTING THEIR PERMISSABLE ACTIVITIES, COULD INHIBIT HEALTHY DEVELOPMENT OF SINGAPOREAN

BODY POLITIC AND MAY EXPOSE SINGAPORE TO HEIGHTENED FOREIGN CRITISIM BY HUMAN RIGHTS AND PRESS FREEDOM ADVOCATES.  
END SUMMARY

2. AMID UNEASE OVER SINGAPORE'S ECONOMIC PROSPECTS, ASEAN COHESION, REGIONAL STABILITY, AND GLOBAL POLITICAL TRENDS, THE CURRENT GOS ANTI-SUBVERSION CAMPAIGN MAY BE VIEWED AS ONE ASPECTS OF PRIME MINISTER LEE KUAN YEW'S EFFORT TO "CLEAR THE DECKS" BEFORE THE GOING GETS ROUGH. SINGAPORE'S LEADERS HAVE LONG PROFESSED INCOMPREHENSION AND ANGER WITH FOREIGN CRITICISM OF SOME OF SINGAPORE'S INTERNAL POLICIES, WHICH CULMINATED IN THE PAP'S EXPULSION/WITHDRAWAL FROM THE SOCIALIST INTERNATIONAL (76 SINGAPORE A-96). THE REVELATIONS PRODUCED BY THE ON-GOING SPATE OF ARRESTS, REVOLVING ABOUT THE RAMAN CASE, APPEAR TO THE GOS AS CONVINCING EVIDENCE THAT SINGAPORE HAS BEEN THE VICTIM OF A COMMUNIST PLOT.

3. THE GOS HAS REACTED IN A RATHER HEAVY-HANDED FASHION, AND THE RECENT CASCADE OF ORAL AND WRITTEN CONFESSIONS, INTERTWINED WITH THE VERY DIFFERENT LEONG MUN KWAI CASE (REF B), HAVE PERHAPS RAISED MORE DOUBTS AND ANXIETIES INSIDE AND OUTSIDE SINGAPORE THAN THE GOS MAY HAVE ANTICIPATED. THE MOST RECENT DEVELOPMENTS -- INCLUDING FOREIGN MINISTER RAJARATNAM'S REMARKS TO PARLIAMENT ON MARCH 11, DETAINED CORRESPONDENT (FINANCIAL TIMES AND SUNDAY TIMES AND FORMERLY FEER) ARUN SENKUTTUVAN'S STATEMENT (RELEASED ON MARCH 11), FORMER FEER CORRESPONDENT HO KWON PING'S RE-ARREST (ON MARCH 12),  
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AND THE G. RAMAN-ARUN SENKUTTUVAN NEWS CONFERENCE (ALSO ON MARCH 12) -- HAVE RAISED QUESTIONS ABOUT THE FUTURE OF "LEGITIMATE" DOMESTIC DISSENT AS WELL AS GOS-GOM BILATERAL RELATIONS AND SINGAPORE'S INTERNATIONAL REPUTATION.

4. FOREIGN MINISTER RAJARATNAM ON MARCH 11 ANSWERED MILD BUT PERSISTENT QUESTIONING BY A FEW MPS ON THE GOS' HANDLING OF THE LEONG MUN KWAI AFFAIR. RAJA SAID, AS HE ALSO HAD IN AN EARLIER CONVERSATION WITH THE AMBASSADOR, THAT GOS-GOM RELATIONS HAD NOT SUFFERED TO "ANY APPRECIABLE DEGREE", FROM THE PUBLICITY GIVEN THE CASE AND THAT ANY DAMAGE WAS STRICTLY SHORT TERM. ONE UNCONFIRMED REPORT HAD RAJA TELLING GOS COUNSELOR IN KUALA LUMPUR M. KISHORE ON MARCH 12 THAT, DESPITE KISHORE'S VIEW THAT GOM WOULD NOT MOVE AGAINST DOMINIC PUTHUCHEARY'S GROUP (REF A) BECAUSE OF HEARTBURN CAUSED GOM BY LEONG AFFAIR, THE GOS ACTIONS WERE CORRECT SINCE AT LEAST GOM HAD BEEN WARNED. OR, TO CITE RAJA'S WORDS TO THE AMBASSADOR, IT WOULD "STOP THE ROT UP THERE".

5. RAJA'S EXASPERATION WITH WHAT HE PERCEIVED AS GOM INACTIVITY IN KUALA LUMPUR WAS LINKED IN HIS PARLIAMENTARY REMARKS TO HMG'S REFUSAL TO ACT AGAINST EXILE STUDENT ACTIVIST TAN WAH PIOW (76 SINGAPORE 4819). RAJA CLAIMED THAT TAN, LIKE LEONG, WAS ALSO A "BLACK AGENT", BUT AVERRED THAT GOS DID NOT HOLD HMG RESPONSIBLE FOR "BLACK OPERATION" SIMPLY BECAUSE TAN HAD BEEN USED BY HOSTILE INDIVIDUALS IN BRITAIN AND HAD SUBSEQUENTLY BEEN GRANTED A RESIDENCE PERMIT THERE. THESE CASES WERE VIEWED BY RAJA AS BEING PART OF A GENERAL GOS EFFORT "TO EDUCATE THE PEOPLE ABOUT POLITICAL REALITIES". RAJA NOTED THAT MANY PEOPLE WERE EASY PREY FOR SUBVERSIVES; "IN THE LAST ELECTION, THOUSANDS OF PEOPLE WERE TAKEN IN BY MR. LEONG AND HIS FRIENDS" (READ THE WORKERS PARTY).

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6. ARUN SENKUTTUVAN, IN A STILTED AND UNCONVINCING WRITTEN CONFESSION, STATED THAT HE HAD "DELIBERATELY DISTORTED AND SUPPRESSED FACTS TO DISCREDIT THE SINGAPORE GOVERNMENT". THE CONFESSION CONSISTED LARGELY OF THE JUXTAPOSITION OF EXCERPTS FROM ARUN'S "SLANTED" AND "CRITICAL" FAR EASTERN ECONOMIC REVIEW (FEER) ARTICLES WITH OBJECTIVE DEPICTIONS OF THE "REAL" FACTS. ACCORDING TO ARUN, HIS DISSATISFACTION WITH GOS PRESS CONTROLS, AND A BROADER RESENTMENT OF THE GOVERNMENT AND ITS POLICIES, GREW OUT OF THE LOSS OF HIS JOB WITH THE SINGAPORE HERALD UPON THE CLOSURE OF THAT PAPER IN 1971 BY THE GOS. ARUN CONFESSED THAT HIS ANTAGONISM TOWARD THE GOS LED HIM TO KNOWINGLY COOPERATE WITH PRO-COMMUNIST ELEMENTS TO PORTRAY THE GOS AS "UNDEMOCRATIC, TOTALITARIAN, AUTOCRATIC AND OPPRESSIVE".

7. ARUN'S STATEMENT AND HIS PRESS CONFERENCE REMARKS FOCUSED ON THE "CELEBRATED CASSETTE TAPE" CONTAINING DEREK DAVIES' RECOLLECTION OF HIS MARCH 1976 CONVERSATION WITH LEE KUAN YEW. WHILE DETAILS OF THE RAMAN-D. PUTHUCHEARY PLOT TO TRANSMIT THE TAPE TO MALAYSIAN PRIME MINISTER HUSSEIN ONN (REF A) WERE RECOUNTED BY ARUN IN GREATER DETAIL DURING THE PRESS CONFERENCE, STILL AT ISSUE IS WHETHER ARUN'S UTILIZATION OF THE TAPE WAS A "GROSS BREACH OF CONFIDENCE" AS DAVIES HAS CLAIMED, OR WHETHER, ACCORDING TO ARUN, "DAVIES HAD GIVEN A CLEAR IMPRESSION THAT THE TAPE BE CIRCULATED IN MALAYSIA".

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P R 150940Z MAR 77  
FM AMEMBASSY SINGAPORE  
TO SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 7320  
INFO AMEMBASSY BANGKOK  
AMCONSUL HONG KONG  
AMEMBASSY JAKARTA  
AMEMBASSY KUALA LUMPUR  
AMEMBASSY LONDON  
AMEMBASSY MANILA

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 2 OF 2 SINGAPORE 1078

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8. SINGAPORE PRESS GAVE EXTENSIVE PLAY TO FEER'S ALLEGED ATTEMPT TO FOMENT GOS-GOM MISUNDERSTANDING BY MEANS OF THIS TAPE AS WELL AS TO ARUN'S FRANK ACKNOWLEDGEMENT THAT FEER DESIRED CONTROVERSIAL REPORTAGE. ISD HAS SINCE REARRESTED HO KWON PING, WHO RESIGNED FROM FEER FOLLOWING HIS RECENT CONVICTION FOR POSSESSING PROTECTED INFORMATION (SINGAPORE 0451). IT IS LIKELY THAT HO IS BEING CLOSELY QUESTIONED IF HE TOO SLANTED HIS POLITICAL COVERAGE OF SINGAPORE.

9. G. RAMAN CAME ACROSS AS A WEAK AND FICKLE BUT ARTICULATE MAN DURING HIS JOINT PRESS CONFERENCE WITH ARUN. WHILE MOST OF THE QUESTIONS FOCUSSED ON OTHER DETAILS OF HIS ALLEGED PLOTS OR ON THE CREDIBILITY OF HIS CATEGORICAL REPUDIATION OF THE CPM LINE OF ARMED STRUGGLE IN "SINGAPORE AND WESTERN MALAYSIA", RAMAN WAS AT HIS BEST IN DESCRIBING HOW THE COMMUNISTS MANIPULATE LIBERALS. RAMAN CITED "LIBERTY, FREEDOM, BASIC RIGHTS" AS SEDUCTIVE ISSUES RIPE FOR MANIPULATION  
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BY THE COMMUNISTS.

10. IN SUM, THE PERVASIVE CONCERN OF THE GOS PRESENT CAMPAIGN APPEARS TO BE THE MANNER IN WHICH OPPOSITION ELEMENTS DISENCHANTED WITH THE GOS ARE PERMITTING THEMSELVES TO BE MANIPULATED BY COMMUNISTS. WHILE THE EFFECT MAY BE UNINTENTIONAL, THE GOS'S ENERGETIC AND RELENTLESS PROSECUTION OF THESE CASES HAS HAD THE EFFECT OF SEVERELY CURTAILING, IF NOT ELIMINATING, THE BASIS FOR AN ACCEPTABLE NON-COMMUNIST OPPOSITION TO THE GOVERNMENT.

11. POTENTIALLY FAR MORE TROUBLESOME IS THE APPARENT MODIFICATION OF THE BOS'S UTILIZATION OF THE INTERNAL SECURITY ACT. HERETOFORE STRICTLY LIMITED TO CASES OF DEMONSTRABLE SUBVERSION OR INCITMENT OF COMMUNAL TENSIONS, THE APPLICATION OF THE ISA IN ARUN,S AND HO'S CASES SMACKS OF "DETENTION UNTIL CONFESSION". WHILE SINGAPORE HAS LEGITIMATE NEED OF THE ISA TO COMBAT CPM ACTIVITIES, ITS MOST RECENT APPLICATIONS HAVE BEEN PERCEIVED BY DISAFFECTED SINGAPOREANS AS A DEMONSTRATION OF GOVERNMENTAL DISPLEASURE OVER DISSIDENCE PER SE.

12. MOST DANGEROUS ASPECT OF CURRENT CAMPAIGN, THEREFORE, IS THE IMPLICIT THREAT TO THE LEGAL OPPOSITION. IN THE LONG TERM, THESE INTIMIDATING ACTIONS COULD UNDERMINE THE POSITIVE GROWTH OF SINGAPORE'S BODY POLITIC. SECOND GENERATION LEADERS SEASONED IN AN ENVIRONMENT OF REPRESSION AND DEVOID OF AN UNDERSTANDING OF TREATING WITH A DEMOCRATIC OPPOSITION, MAY FIND THEMSELVES ILL-PREPARED TO DEAL WITH PROBLEMS WHICH WILL ASSUREDLY CONFRONT SINGAPORE IN THE FUTURE.

13. IN THE SHORTER TERM, THE GOS MAY CONCEIVABLY ESCALATE ITS CAMPAIGN AGAINST THE FEER AND POSSIBLY OTHER WESTERN MEDIA AND MEDIA REPRESENTATIVES. AT ANY RATE, THEY HAVE ALL BEEN WARNED. THE GOVERNMENT'S VIEW ON A RESPONSIBLE PRESS MAY HAVE BEEN AUTHORITATIVELY STATED IN A MARCH 15 STRAITS TIMES

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EDITORIAL: "AS FOR SINGAPORE'S NEWSPAPERS, ALTHOUGH THEY ARE FAR FROM BEING FOCIFEROUSLY CRITICAL OF THE PAP, IT WOULD BE UNFAIR TO ACCUSE OUR PRESSMEN OF SERVILITY TO GOVERNMENTAL DICTATES. IN FACT, DESPITE LEGAL AND OFFICIAL CONSTRAINTS ON THE PRESS, IT HAS IN LARGE MEASURE REMAINED RELATIVELY INDEPENDENT, EVEN IF NOT EXCITINGLY ANTI-ESTABLISHMENT IN THE WESTERN FASHION. BECAUSE MOST LOCAL NEWSPAPERMEN ACCEPT THE INTRICACIES OF SINGAPORE'S GEO- POLITICAL PREDICAMENTS (SIC), THEY ARE LESS LIKELY TO FALL PREY TO PROPAGANDISTS WHO, BY THEIR OWN ADMISSION, SLANT NEWS AND FACTS TO INJURE SINGAPORE'S IMAGE INTERNATIONALLY. IT DOES NOT LOOK AS IF THE SAME CAN BE SAID FOR WESTERN MEDIA CIRCLES".

14. EVEN PRIME MINISTER LEE JOINED THE FRAY ACCORDING TO THE MARCH 15 NEW NATION, IN AN INTERVIEW RECORDED IN SINGAPORE WITH THE BBC'S LUDOVIC KENNEDY AIRED IN LONDON ON MARCH 14, LEE ACCUSED THE COMMUNISTS OF PORTRAYING HIM AND OTHER NON-COMMUNIST LEADERS OF SEA "AS CORRUPT, DICTATORIAL, CAPRICIOUS, WICKED, VICIOUS . . ." WHILE LEE'S OFT-HEARD VIEWS ON THIS THEME ARE NO DOUBT TO SOME DEGREE VALID, THE FEELING HERE IS THAT IN LIGHT OF RECENT DEVELOPMENTS, THE GOOD PRIME MINISTER DOOTH PERPAHS PROTEST TOO MUCH. LEE AND HIS GOVERNMENT RUN A SERIOUS RISK, IN OUR VIEW, IF THE PRESENT HARD-NOSED CAMPAIGN AGAINST MISGUIDED OPPOSITION ELEMENTS AND A CRITICAL FOREIGN PRESS CONTINUES, OF ALIENATING EVEN FRIENDLY AND FORGIVING OBSERVERS.  
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## Message Attributes

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